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TRAVELING LIBRARIES IN ALABAMA.¹

THE South has long been distinguished for its leaders in peace and in war. We have been told, however, that "mountain ranges are estimated by their peaks, and races by their greatest men." We are thus immediately led to ask what a section which has produced without universal education Jeffersons and Lees may not produce when education is brought to all?

A movement has for some years been on foot to bring up to a good educational level or average the masses of the South; for thoughtful people have learned that the thrift, industry, economy, and wealth of the East and North are produced by their system of public schools as much as by any one factor. Never before have our public men, inclusive of State governors, our women, too, at home and in clubs, seemed so possessed by the idea that reform of social, industrial, and commercial conditions must come through reform in schools. This truth is proved by history, with Germany as its latest exemplar.

South Carolina and Louisiana, heretofore laggards in the march, are stepping forward. Georgia is winning epaulets, for she doubled her school appropriation last year. But Alabama, *with only New Mexico below her in educational status*, is still in a state of lethargy from which a few of her citizens are striving to rouse her.

As is the case the wide world over, it is the women who are the first awake, who are first endeavoring to set in order

¹ Although this article, written at the editor's request when he heard of the movement it describes, is not a "literary study" and thus hardly falls within the purview of the REVIEW, it deals with a matter that is fundamental to the development of literary and every other kind of study in the South, and is therefore published in the hope that all of our readers will aid to the best of their abilities the development of the Traveling Library, not only in Alabama but in every other Southern State, and will labor strenuously in the interests of that Southern education and culture of which this REVIEW will always endeavor to be a promoter and exponent.

W. P. T.

a new institution. The Tennessee Federation of Women's Clubs have set an inspiring example by their interest and assistance in public school labor. The Georgia Federation of Women's Clubs have inaugurated an organization similar to one familiar now in the Northern states—to wit, the Traveling Library, whose chief promoter was Melville Dewey, of New York.

The Traveling Library “brings the university to the people,” to those whose attendance on the university proper is made impossible by reason of poverty, business, or home cares; it continues the education of the graduates; and it displaces the poisonous cheap literature sown broadcast through the land by publishing houses whose only object is pecuniary gain and whose frequent advertisement is “forty novels for twenty-five cents.”

In Alabama the promoters of liberal education find their effort at securing favorable legislation paralyzed by the State constitution. For instance, since the State made no provision for school-buildings, and left “confusion worse confounded” when locating schools in rural districts, a strenuous endeavor has been made by the Committee on Educational Status under the leadership of a scholarly and energetic gentleman, Mr. Phillips, of Birmingham, their chairman, to get a bill passed enabling each county to tax itself for its own buildings and equipments. But the present constitution forbids this right of local tax, a right exercised in other States with beneficent results, and it will be three years before a new constitution can be secured and made effective.

And now, the great effort of the women's clubs of Alabama is the creation of a public sentiment favorable to the Traveling Library. With a set of books in each rural district that is sufficiently advanced to use it (the sad fact faces us that in some of our counties many adults cannot read); with every set of forty books in all the several thousands remaining in each district from three to six months, with libraries in every large town, what an awakening may not come!

In promoting public education the women of Alabama feel that they are in touch with the spirit of Thomas Jefferson, whose monument is the University of Virginia. That monument, however, has not the foundation and cornerstone that he would desire for a monument to a great educator; for he ever insisted on elementary, grammar, and high schools, articulating with the university—the “ladder from the gutter to the university,” as Huxley puts it; the “jack under the mudsills to lift the whole structure,” as Henry Ward Beecher expressed it. The thought of these three great minds ran, we thus see, in the same channel; for whatever may have been the genesis of two of them, all three had Yankee sense, that “common sense” which is so uncommon.

One long-desired opportunity will be afforded by the Traveling Library—that of placing impartial history in the hands of Southern youth to show them that in the valor and patriotism of our country they are coheirs; to show conclusively that secession and nullification did not have their beginning or birth in the South; to prove that in the Revolutionary War and that of 1812 it was with a greater percentage of Southern than of any other soldiers that the battles were fought which achieved our independence and safety; that Southern statesmen aided in forming the Constitution and have been as loyal to it as the men of any section; that in the civil war a greater percentage of Southern soldiers died for their principles and rights than have died of any army in any modern war; and to universalize the facts that prove us worthy of the eulogy of that noble Englishman, Lord Derby:

No nation rose so pure and fair,
None fell so free of crime.

We would not be provincial, but we would prove that in a spirit of broad patriotism we are proud to say that this is our country, that we have never disgraced it and never shall. With such books as Curry’s “History of the South in Relation to the Union,” showing our youth “the glorious worth of their descent;” with Dr. J. William Jones’s “History of

the United States," permeated with manliness, energy, and love of right; with biographies of Lee, whose life was "the seed-plot and harvest of all virtues"—with such books put before him, does there live a boy whose soul will not be stirred to nobler aspirations and better deeds?

In these libraries commencing thus with State and local histories, according to scientific principles of starting with a basis of the nearly related, and stretching from that to further correlations, we hope, too, to have our people instructed by the great minds of every age and every clime—for, of wisdom, it is indeed true that "age cannot wither her, nor custom stale her infinite variety."

Col. McClure, that impressive gray-haired veteran editor of the Philadelphia *Times*, has lately been befriending Alabama by going through the State encouraging in his fine addresses better tillage of our rich fields and the development of manufactures based upon our agricultural commodities and minerals. He has appealed to the genius of enterprise by enunciating the truth that "wealth comes to a people when their products are brought to the highest form of value on their native soil." The women of Alabama through the Traveling Libraries will urge the people to bring *man* to *his* highest form of value, and will help to accomplish this by educating the young people of the State.

When we take care of our industrious infants, our "infant industries" will take care of themselves.

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